



**TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
FEBRUARY 17, 2015**

**IN SUPPORT OF:
RAISED HB 5658 AAC EDUCATIONAL SURROGATES, THE JUVENILE
JUSTICE SYSTEM AND CHILDREN REQUIRING SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**SB 842 AN ACT CONCERNING FOSTER PARENTS AND THE DESIGNATION
OF SURROGATE PARENTS**

**S.B. NO. 863 AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE RISK AND NEEDS
ASSESSMENTS**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee on Children, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Abby Anderson; I am the executive director of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance. The Alliance is a statewide advocacy organization dedicated to stopping the criminalization of Connecticut's children. We work to reduce the number of youth who enter the system and ensure the juvenile justice system is safe, fair and effective for those who are involved. In alignment with that mission, the Alliance is in favor of H.B 5658, *An Act Concerning Educational Surrogates, the Juvenile Justice System and Children Requiring Special Education* and SB 842, *An Act Concerning Foster Parents and the Designation of Surrogate Parents*. We are also supporting S.B. 863, *An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice Risk And Needs Assessments*.

H.B. 5658 would give youth committed delinquent to DCF the same access to educational advocacy supports that their peers committed to the foster care system already receive. As parents of youth committed delinquent do not lose their parental rights, it is important to note that these educational surrogates should only be provided with parental consent. To that end, we would respectfully request that the language of SB 842, which addresses parental consent for youth committed delinquent, be added to HB 5658.

As this committee is well aware, and has worked to address with legislation including last year's focus on Raise the Grade, youth in the justice system are typically alarmingly behind in school. DCF's recent annual report to the legislature regarding the boys in Connecticut Juvenile Training School in 2014 showed that 27% of the 16 year olds admitted last year had a reading comprehension level of third grade or below. Only 38% of them have a reading comprehension level that is at 7th grade or above.

DCF is focused on the educational achievement of the delinquent youth in its custody, implementing Raise the Grade programs where piloted. Working with individual districts can be challenging and time-consuming. Educational surrogates, engaged with parental consent, have the expertise, time and relationships built to more quickly and effectively

navigate with the local educational agencies to ensure that the education needs of the youth can be met.

We know that education is the key to employment. Employment is a key to reducing recidivism. An investment in the educational achievement of these youth today is not only the right thing to do for these young people, but a way to save taxpayer dollars going forward.

The Alliance also supports SB 863, An Act Concerning Risk Assessments. This legislation simply ensures consistency in policy and practice. Currently statute states that boys may only be committed delinquent to the Connecticut Juvenile Training School if they score as high-risk on a risk assessment tool. The statute was written before the Pueblo Unit for girls was opened last year. SB 863 would require, similar to current statute, that girls would only be committed delinquent to CJTS's Pueblo Unit when assessed as high-risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Alliance member organizations: AFCAMP, Center for Children's Advocacy, Center for Effective Practice, CHDI, Connecticut Junior Republic, Connecticut Legal Services, Connecticut Voices for Children, Connecticut Youth Services Association, Community Partners in Action, FAVOR, FSW, NAMI Connecticut, Keep the Promise Coalition, Office of the Chief Public Defender, Office of the Child Advocate, RYASAP, The Tow Foundation, The Village for Families and Children